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ABSTRACT

Noting that America's need for youth services is at an all-time high, this study surveyed frontline youth workers and youth organization directors in Indiana to determine their needs and how those needs were being met. Focus groups with youth workers were also conducted. Key findings are as follows: (1) though 75 percent are college graduates, nearly 7 out of 10 full-time youth workers earn less than $30,000, and more than 20 percent report salaries under $20,000; (2) while 44 percent are their families' primary wage earners, close to 40 percent have no retirement plan; (3) youth workers spend only 25-50 percent of their time in direct service to youth; an increasing workload of administrative tasks--including fund raising, strategic planning, and volunteer recruitment--diverts their time; (4) less than half of frontline youth workers have access to the Internet; (5) youth workers say that many parents do not understand the value of positive youth development and often treat them more like babysitters than professionals; and (6) 45 percent say they may leave the youth work field within 5 years. Several recommendations were devised to address these issues. (EV)

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The Indiana Youth Institute
Serving those who work with youth

YOUTH WORK:

MORE THAN CHILD'S PLAY

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PS 029257

Who are Indiana's youth workers?

What do they do?

What do they need?

What do they want?

A report from the field

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Research Methodology

The Youth Worker Study was conducted in 1999 among full-time Indiana youth professionals who work at a cross-section of urban, suburban, small town and rural agencies, some affiliated with national youth organizations and some independent.

The study used three instruments:

1,755 cross-sectional short-answer surveys mailed to individual youth workers who work directly with youth and families ("frontline youth workers"), with 164 returned (a 9.3% return rate).

27 focus group interviews involving frontline youth workers, 179 of whom also completed the survey, increasing the total number of individual surveys available for analysis to 343.

685 organizational surveys mailed to agency administrators, with 66 returned (a 9.6% return rate).

Youth work isn't child's play.

The fact is, America's need for youth services is at an all-time high. With more parents working more hours than ever before, there is a growing demand for consistent delivery of top quality non-school activities for children and youth.

Of course, the value of youth work goes well beyond issues of safe sites and supervised activities. The positive impact that caring adults have on children has been documented dozens of times and in dozens of ways. Youth who enjoy positive relationships with adults in high-quality youth development programs tend to do better in life. It's that simple. What isn't simple is finding ways to support the adults who support our children.

Too many youth workers operate in a crisis mode environment; and any investment in Indiana's youth workers is an investment in Indiana's youth. Agreement on those statements prompts two questions. What, exactly, are the needs of this specialized workforce whose efforts help shape the next generation? How well do our communities meet those needs?

Any attempt to improve conditions for Indiana's youth workers is premature without first learning the answers to those key questions. The Indiana Youth Institute, working with John Brandon of the Marion County Commission on Youth and Dr. Marie Watkins, at the time with Indiana University's School of Social Work and now with Nazareth College, Rochester, New York, proposed a study to probe the critical issues that concern today's frontline youth workers. In consultation with Dr. Judith Erickson, IYI's research director emeritus, a major research project was designed that involved surveys and focus groups of frontline youth workers and supplementary surveys of agency administrators.

Dr. Watkins, uniquely qualified by her past experience as a frontline youth worker and program administrator, served as principal investigator and spent months criss-crossing the state and gathering data. She and her team visited communities as diverse in size and population as Evansville, Gary, Madison, Fort Wayne, Indianapolis, Greenfield and Columbus. They spoke with frontline staff members at large and small youth agencies, whose primary responsibility is to work directly with young people during non-school hours. Some of their agencies were affiliates of national organizations, others were independent groups.

This document distills their findings. Among the questions that it answers are:

- Who *are* Indiana's youth workers?
- What are their responsibilities and day-to-day duties?
- What professional tools do they need?
- What career incentives do they want?

The study's results are only the beginning. Of equal interest are the implications and specific recommendations that spring from them. By listening to hundreds of voices we now have a clearer picture of who Indiana's youth workers are and how we can help sustain them; we better understand youth-work issues and how we might address them; we recognize many of the profession's needs and how we can begin to meet them.

By putting this knowledge to work, together we can make a difference in the lives of people who make a difference in the lives of youth.

Indeed, youth work is not child's play.

Bill Stanczykiewicz
Executive Director
Indiana Youth Institute

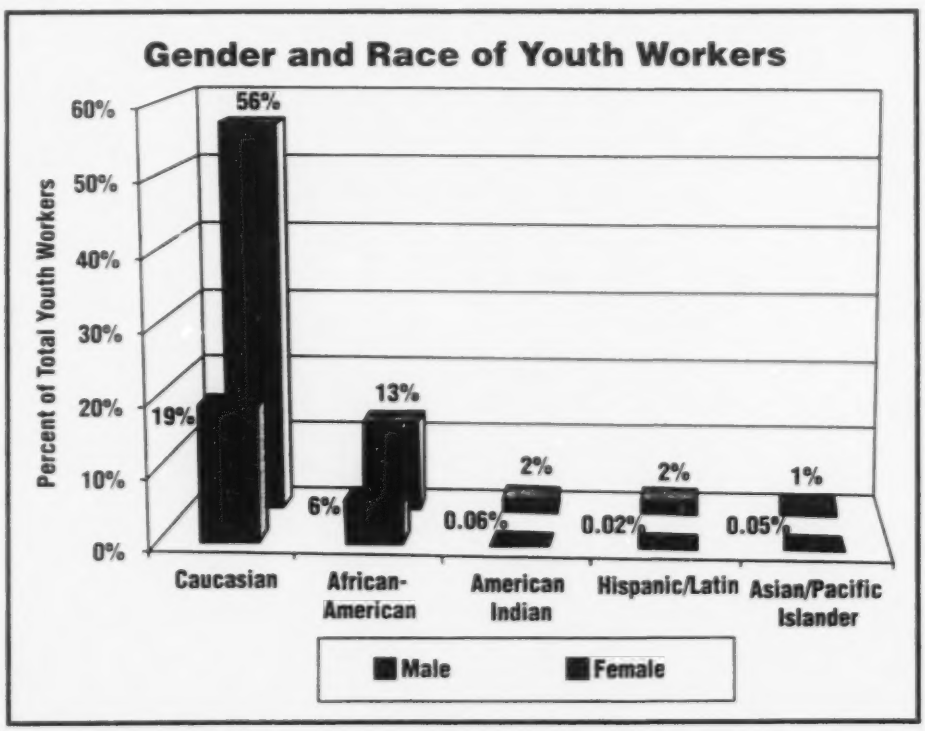
Who are Indiana's youth workers?

Indiana's youth workers enter their profession for all the right reasons. Survey participants say they "want to make a difference" and they enjoy building "positive relationships with young people." The average Hoosier youth worker is a 36-year-old white woman who has been in the profession for eight years and holds a college degree in social work or education. A snapshot of her colleagues indicates:

- 75% are white; 19% are African American; 2% are Hispanic; 2% are Native American; 1% are Asian. (By comparison, the U.S. Census reports that over 88% of Indiana children are white; 10.4% are African American; .2% are Native American; and 1% are Asian, with 3.6% of Hispanic origin included within these groups.)
- 74% of the respondents were female: 56% of youth workers are white females; 13% are African-American females.
- 75% are college graduates, although only one-fifth of their jobs require post-secondary degrees.
- 48% of the executive directors are male, although males represent only a quarter of the youth worker workforce.
- The average youth worker has two children, puts in 43.7 hours a week and earns between $20,000 and $29,999 annually.
- Almost 44% of youth workers are their families' primary wage earners.

"I love kids. I think they are our future and I would never want to work anywhere else except in a youth work agency."
—Focus group participant

As they look ahead, slightly more than half of the youth workers see themselves continuing in the field five years in the future; a third are not sure, and one in ten plans to leave. Money, benefits, length of the workday and family obligations play into these career decisions.



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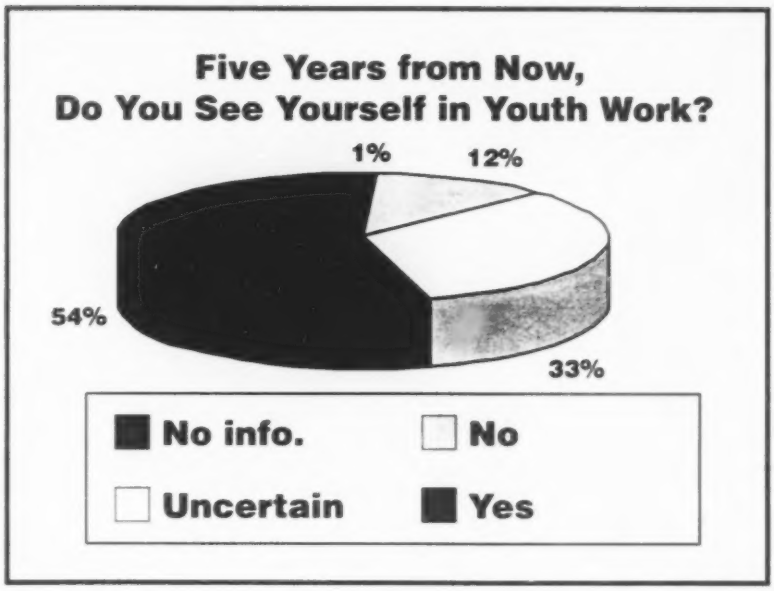
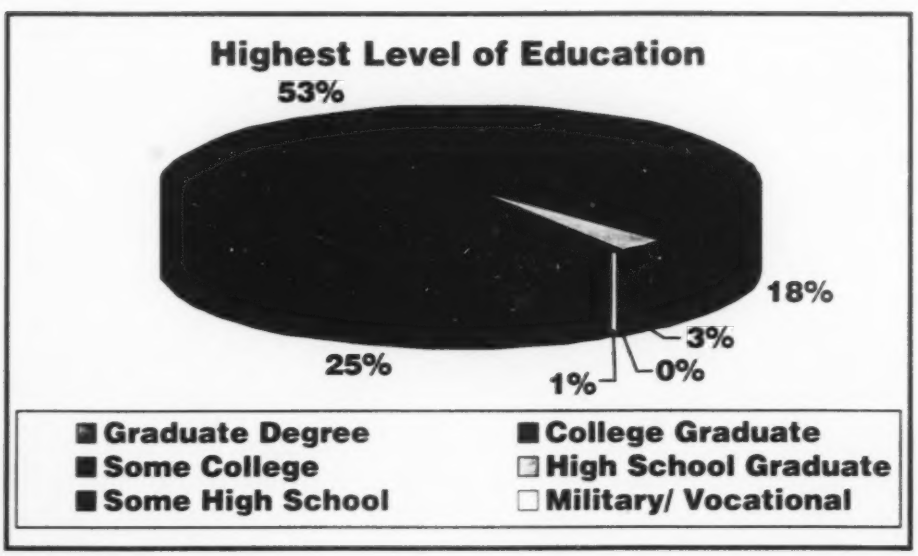
Who are Indiana's youth workers?

What does this mean?

- Positive interaction with male role models, particularly important for children growing up in families headed by single mothers, may be limited because of the small number of males in frontline youth work.
- With the predominance of female and white youth workers in this state, communities must ensure that youth services match the cultural diversity of their local population.
- Education poses another question. An overwhelming majority of youth workers have earned one or two college degrees, most of these in social work or education. However, only a small number of Indiana colleges offer an academic framework of positive youth development specifically applicable to a youth work position. Do youth workers have the academic knowledge they really need?
- The reported average of eight years in the youth work may be misleading. Focus group participants indicated that staff turnover is high, robbing kids of valuable long-term relationships with adults in community youth agencies.



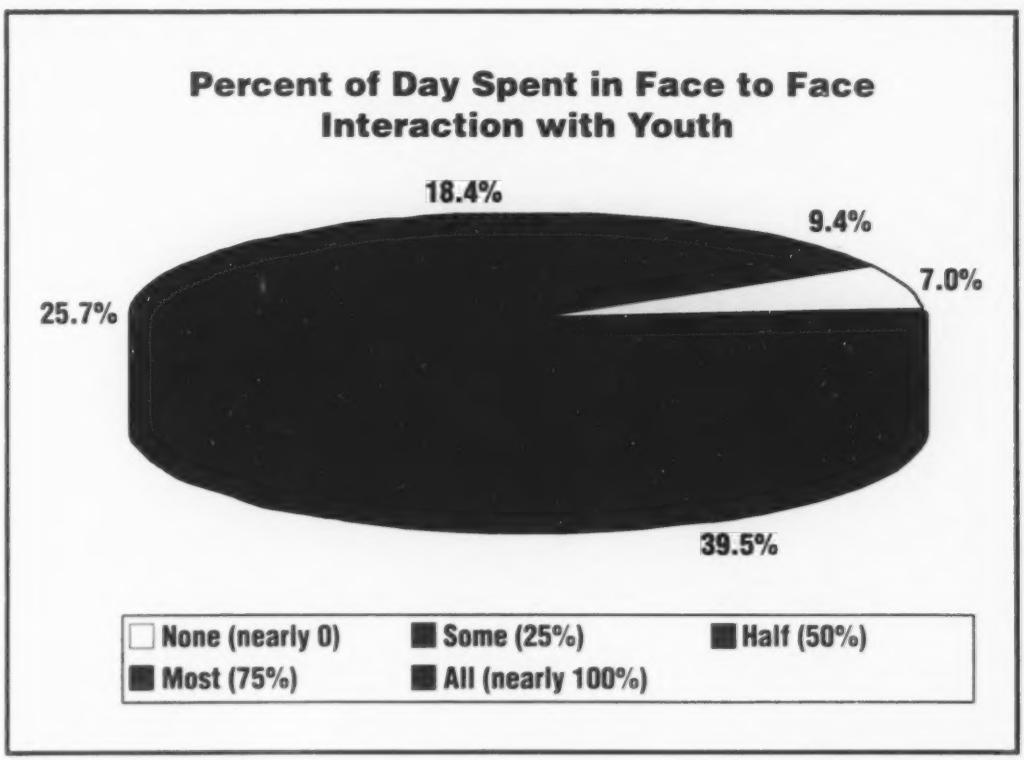


What do youth workers do?

The survey showed that most frontline youth workers spend a majority of the day working on *behalf* of youth rather than *with* youth. Duties vary depending upon the size of the agency's staff. The larger the staff, the more time frontline workers interact directly with children.

- On average, frontline youth workers spend only 25-50% of their time in direct service to youth.
- Focus groups confirmed that an increasing number of administrative tasks are tugging workers away from youth – including staff and volunteer supervision, budget management and fund raising.
- Youth workers who also must raise funds are frustrated by lengthy grant applications, short grant periods, cumbersome reporting procedures and grants that will not cover salaries, benefits and operational costs of a program.

When they *are* performing direct service responsibilities, about 84% of the youth workers say they interact directly with children and youth, and four out of five say they work directly with families. In focus groups, youth workers expressed a profound belief in the preventative value of youth development, face-to-face work with youth and providing positive adult role models.



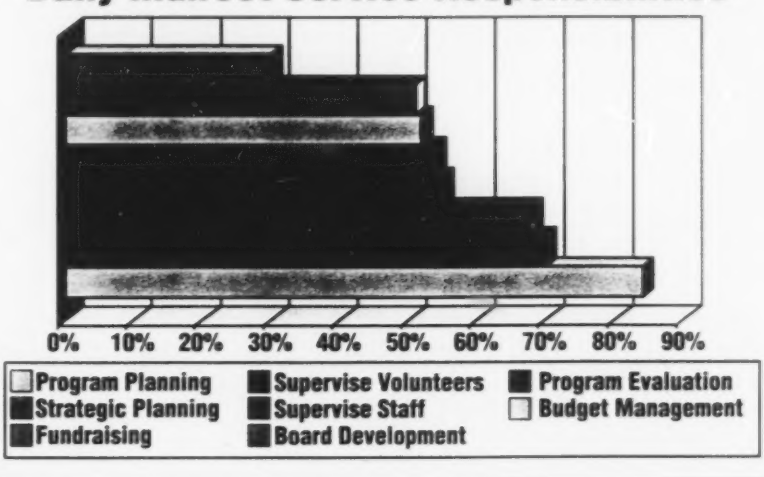
What do youth workers do?

What does this mean?

- Youth workers, particularly those employed by small agencies, have too many responsibilities that keep them away from youth. Negative repercussions include:
  - → Youth have less time to build positive relationships with caring adults.
  - → Youth workers are denied opportunities to pursue their interests and utilize their skills.
  - → Multiple unrelated demands may lead to stress, burn-out and eventually staff turnover – which in turn disrupts the bonding and supportive relationships that staff members have developed with children and their families.
  - → Lack of time for proper planning, which could produce a crisis mode situation.
- Youth workers may not have adequate training to perform indirect services like fund raising, budgeting and marketing. This could lead to inefficient and ineffective efforts.
- Grant applications and well-intended grant requirements may hinder instead of help youth workers, adding challenges that adversely affect intended consequences.

"In an ideal world we would do what we like to do—work with kids—and let somebody else apply for the grants, write the reports and do the marketing."
—Focus group participant

Percentage of Youth Workers Who Have Daily Indirect Service Responsibilities



What professional tools do youth workers need?

Communication tools as basic as adequate telephones, fax machines, beepers and computers are in short supply in many of the youth-serving agencies surveyed.

- Less than half of frontline youth workers have access to the Internet at their agencies.
- Youth workers' computers often are donated, out-of-date, expensive to repair and not compatible with colleagues' terminals. They are rarely available for use by youth.
- Agencies that do have upgraded computers, Internet access, e-mail and other technology primarily restrict them for the use of administrative tasks such as grant writing and outcome documentation.
- Focus group participants reported they often rely on use of their home computers to complete necessary youth work tasks.
- Many youth workers mentioned the need for ongoing computer education and reliable technology support.

"If you're not online, you're in the Stone Age."
—Focus group participant

Professional tools that youth workers say will help them in their jobs go beyond hardware and extend to continuing education opportunities that upgrade skills and provide interaction with peers. Seminar topics that would interest include:

- helping children with disruptive behaviors;
- designing positive youth development strategies;
- working with parents and volunteers;
- using time management and other skills to streamline administrative tasks that can reduce interaction with youth.

Youth workers also said more opportunities to network with colleagues would enhance their professional development. Some wish for a chance to be mentored by a seasoned youth worker or to have access to a working laboratory of "best practices" in youth development. Yet, ironically, due to hectic schedules and a lack of substitute staff, few youth workers are able to attend structured networking events. For them, the needs of the children and the increasing administrative demands must come first.

Transportation for children was frequently mentioned as a challenge in focus groups. Getting children safely from school to youth programs, transporting them on field trips, and parents who did not pick up their children were all cited as problems.

What does this mean?

- The lack of access to technology has obvious and subtle implications. If frontline youth workers could tap into the Internet they could:
  - → benefit from resources available on the Web sites of state and national organizations and clearinghouses;
  - → use e-mail to recruit volunteers and communicate with parents, school personnel and other adults who play key roles in youth development;
  - → network with peers without the barriers of time and location;
  - → participate in distance-learning classes and enroll in Internet courses;
  - → in short, participate more fully in the 21st Century.
- A lack of adequate technological tools (e-mail, databases, etc.) can translate into more time spent on administrative tasks and a lower quality of programming for youth.
- The personal safety of staff and children may be jeopardized by the lack of telephones, cell phones or other types of security systems in agencies.
- On a more subtle level, denying technology tools to frontline workers sends a negative message. It reinforces the perception that frontline youth work isn't valued enough to warrant the equipment that many professions consider routine.

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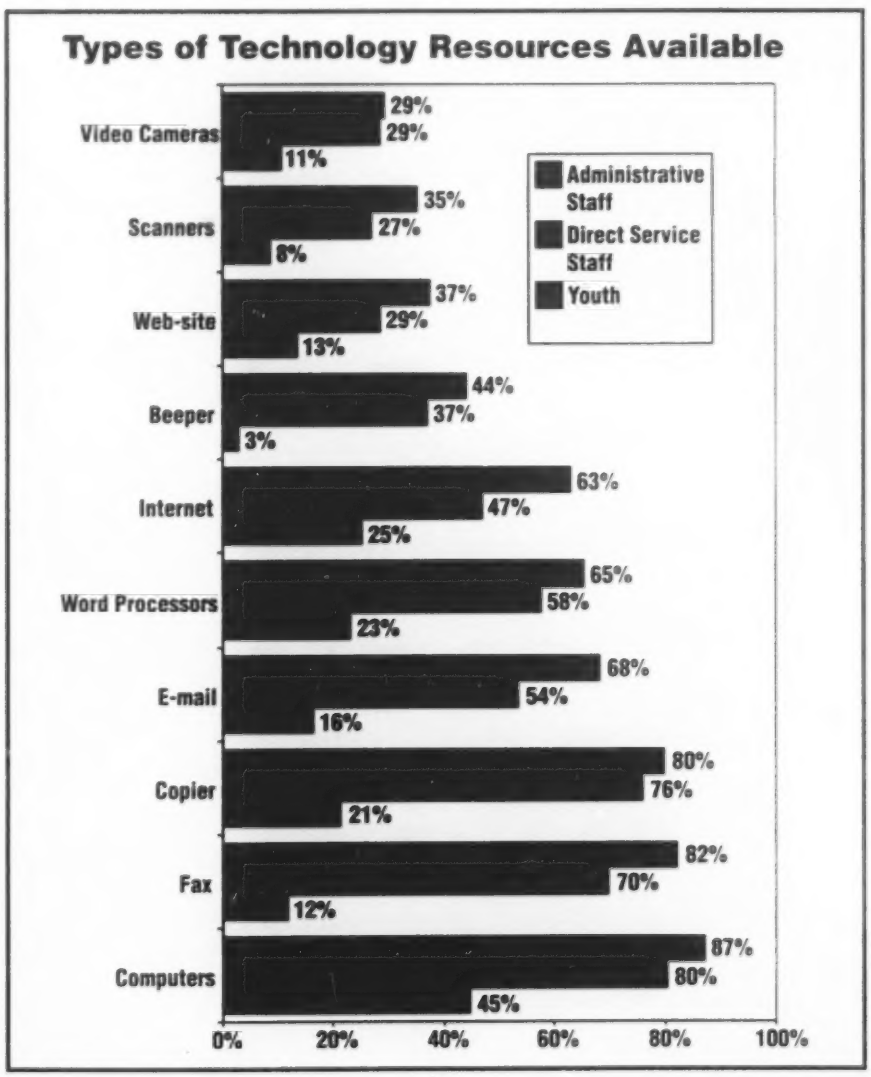
What professional tools do youth workers need?

- A significant barrier for incorporating technology into the youth work sector is not the cost of software and hardware, but the lack of in-house technology know-how. Staff training in the use of technology must be included in any technology planning.
- It is ironic that the same youth workers who requested more training on healthy youth development and prevention also wanted intervention tactics such as "working with youth with disruptive behaviors." This may reflect how the long-term benefits of positive youth development can be overwhelmed by the immediate needs and behaviors of the children youth workers see every day.
- More networking and interaction with colleagues can positively impact the youth worker on both the professional and personal levels, leading to:
  - → increased collaboration and sharing among agencies;
  - → fewer "turf" issues when competing with other agencies for volunteers, clients and dollars;
  - → a decrease in the sense of isolation frequently expressed by youth workers;
  - → emotional renewal and increased hands-on learning.
- Lack of adequate transportation may prevent children from attending existing youth programs, or worse, may endanger their safety as they walk from school to after-school sites. Inadequate transportation may also prohibit field trips and the ability to take advantage of community learning opportunities. Liability also becomes an issue when a parent neglects to pick up a child and the youth worker is faced with having to drive a child home.



What career incentives do youth workers want?

Career incentives that dominate the most-wanted list of youth workers include better salaries and benefits, more opportunities for professional growth, improved public understanding of youth work and increased parental involvement. Research supports the need for adequate salaries and benefits:

- Nearly seven out of ten full-time Indiana youth workers earn less than $30,000 a year, and more than 20% report salaries under $20,000.
- Although 80% have health insurance, the majority describe it as "substandard."
- Close to 40% have no retirement plan.
- Fewer than 50% have dental and vision coverage.
- Three-fourths receive paid vacation time but often hesitate to take it because no one is available to cover for them in their absence.

"I have colleagues who have left the field who are darn good at what they do. But they can't support their families, and that angers me."
—Focus group participant

Many survey participants say that although funds are budgeted for local and out-of-town conferences, budget crunches often require the reallocation of money to cover day-to-day operations. Although about half wish to continue their formal education, lack of time and money are obstacles. Tuition reimbursement, paid opportunities to attend courses providing professional CEU's, and scholarships are the most frequently requested professional development benefits.

Youth workers also mention the importance of increased support, recognition and appreciation for their work as incentives to staying in the field. They report that parents and others in the community do not understand the preventive value of positive youth development, and often treat youth workers more like babysitters than professionals. A common concern in focus group discussions was a perceived decrease in parent and community involvement with youth, and the skewed values this might reflect in our society.

What does this mean?

- Persons who have the interest and skills to work with young people may opt for other careers unless communities address the tangible and intangible needs of youth workers.

→ Current salaries and benefits can be disincentives for entering and remaining in the field, especially for those youth workers who must support a family.

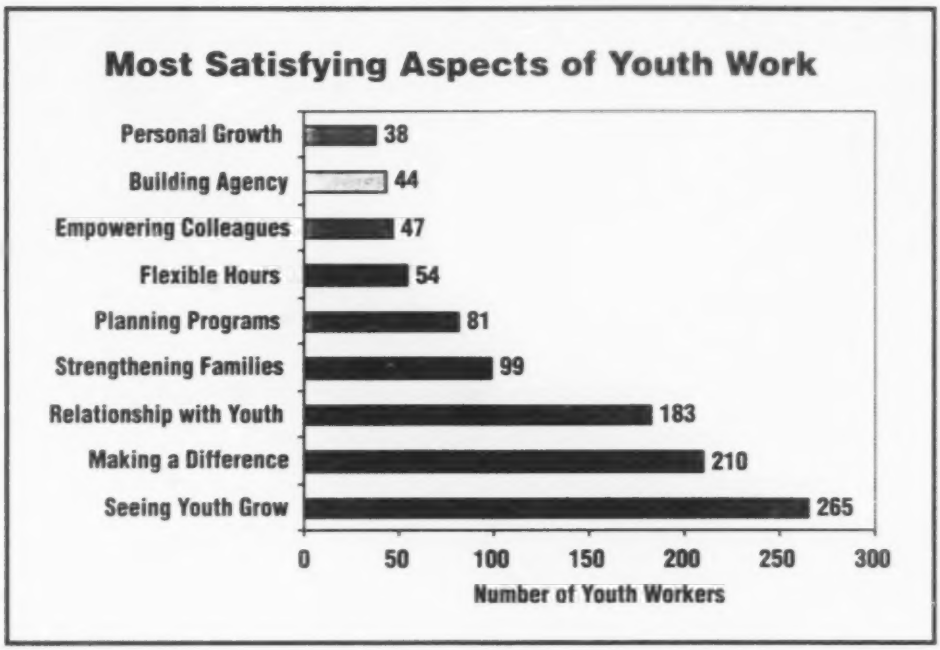
→ Low salaries may also persuade college graduates to avoid youth work and enter other more lucrative fields.

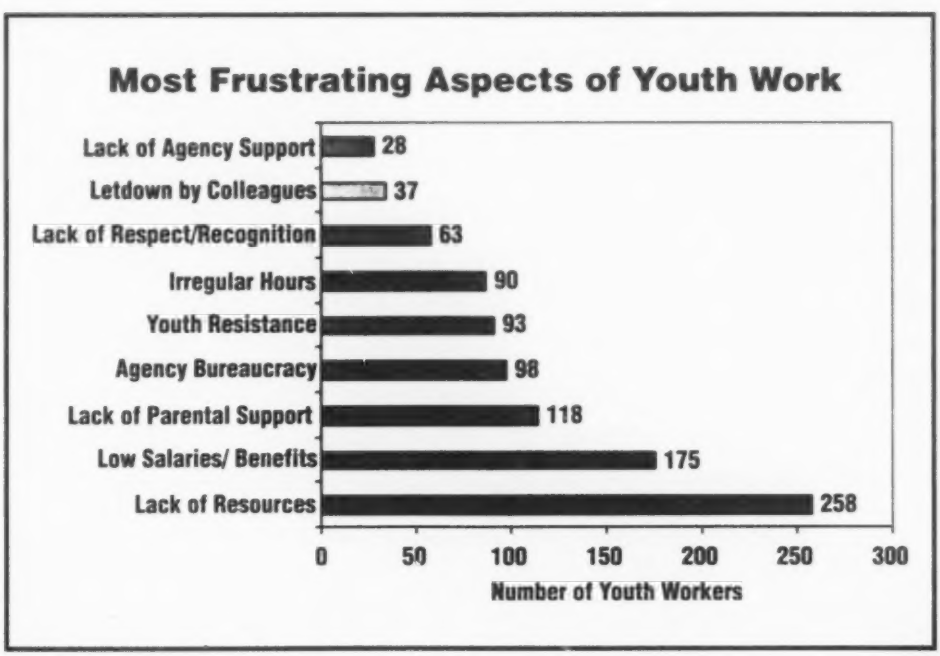
→ A lack of alternative job-related incentives (e.g. child care, transportation or flexible scheduling) may lead to poor attendance and high staff turnover. This adversely affects efficient service delivery, consistent relationships with youth and the confidence families have in the program.

→ Unless continuing education opportunities are given priority, workers cannot expand their skills and grow as professionals. Rather, they are being locked into a stressful process of working harder and longer, instead of learning how to work smarter and more effectively.

→ A lack of parental and community support for the youth development field – and more importantly, for children in general – can have disturbing consequences. Many children may be forced to grow up without a solid support network of positive adult relationships, behavioral boundaries and stimulating experiences so important in shaping their values, self-esteem and life prospects.

What career incentives do youth workers want?




Most Frustrating Aspects of Youth Work
Lack of Agency Support 28
Letdown by Colleagues 37
Lack of Respect/Recognition 63
Irregular Hours 90
Youth Resistance 93
Agency Bureaucracy 98
Lack of Parental Support 118
Low Salaries/ Benefits 175
Lack of Resources 258
0 50 100 150 200 250 300
Number of Youth Workers

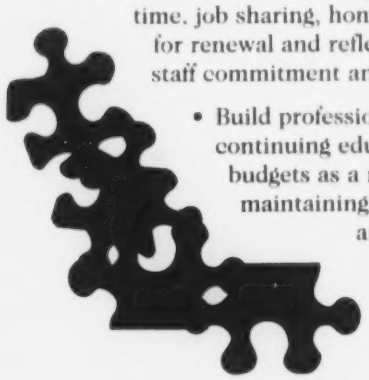
A Strategy for Action

This report can be a catalyst to strengthen the youth work field and keep compassionate and qualified individuals working on behalf of our children. Toward this end, we solicited specific recommendations from the youth workers themselves, as well as from nearly 125 educators, funders and others whose efforts can impact the youth work field. We don't pretend that this is an exhaustive list. But we hope these recommendations can inspire further creative thinking and serve as a blueprint for action in all sectors of the community.

Youth organization boards and agency directors can:

Enhance youth worker salaries, benefits and workplace incentives.

- Be willing to step out of the box to establish salary and benefit levels that can provide reasonable support for youth workers and their families, and set aggressive fund-raising goals to meet these needs.
- Provide graduated salary increases for those who prefer to remain in direct service to children.
- Learn about how functional accounting can help build wages and other operational expenses into grant proposals for youth programs.
- Create a clear employee organizational chart and written job descriptions to help youth workers understand expectations and visualize opportunities for professional growth.
- Consider creative staffing and scheduling (flex-time, job sharing, home offices, regular time for renewal and reflection) to maintain staff commitment and enthusiasm.
- Build professional development and continuing education into agency budgets as a necessary part of maintaining quality youth work, and provide adequate staff coverage to ensure that youth workers can attend these opportunities.



Connect the Board of Directors with the everyday realities of youth work.

- Provide opportunities for the board to interact meaningfully with children served by the agency.
- Arrange a board/staff retreat to explore the Youth Worker Study implications for your agency, and brainstorm solutions.
- Set minimum requirements for board members to actively help your agency meet agreed-upon goals in fund raising and involvement, and outline expectations clearly in board job descriptions.
- Invite one or more staff members to each board meeting to give a "report from the frontline" and discuss issues that arise from the report.
- Train the board in effective strategic planning to enhance program effectiveness, staff development, fund raising and marketing.
- Establish a council of local youth organization board presidents and executive directors who can seek collaborations, pool resources and solve problems they have in common.
- Create opportunities for positive board recognition of staff members.
- Seek a teacher, principal or school board member for your Board of Directors who could arrange school-youth organization cooperation and collaboration.

Free up time for more direct work with children.

- Cross-train staff to eliminate excessive responsibilities for any one worker.
- Take the time to plan program, staff and fund raising goals well in advance to avoid a "crisis-mode" environment.
- Take advantage of existing supports (e.g. Indiana Youth Institute www.iyi.org, Executive Service Corps www.iesc.org, community foundations, United Ways, VolunteerMatch www.volunteermatch.org or your local Retired & Senior Volunteer Program).

A Strategy for Action

- When possible, outsource administrative functions to freelance contractors. This frees more youth worker time for children, and saves on benefits, space and equipment costs.
- Learn how good technology planning and regular improvements can save administrative time and money over the long run. Routinely build technology upgrades and maintenance into program budgets.

Seek other creative ways to collaborate with nearby nonprofit agencies.

- Share underutilized space.
- Jointly purchase a van and establish schedules for its use.
- Develop collaborative programs that share staff expertise and provide interaction for youth workers and children from different agencies.
- Collaborate on joint professional training.
- Create a social occasion to bring youth workers together for informal networking.
- Share some administrative employees, consultants or resources (e.g. human resources, public relations, building maintenance or purchasing personnel, volunteer coordination, transportation).

Foster an atmosphere that appreciates and celebrates diversity.

- Strategically recruit male staff members and volunteers to act as role models for boys and girls, perhaps by developing relationships with other civic, economic or social organizations that have strong male memberships.
- Seek board members who reflect the diversity of your agency's constituents.
- Incorporate sensitivity and a celebration of diverse races, cultures, religions, physical abilities and other backgrounds into staff training, programming and services to youth.

Local and statewide institutions that support positive youth development can:

Actively advocate for the youth work field.

- Publicly recognize and reward exemplary youth service.
- Gather information and anecdotes about successful outcomes at local youth organizations and work with the media to tell these positive stories.
- Sponsor community data-gathering projects (such as youth mapping or surveys of youth needs) to provide a springboard for community discussion about youth issues.
- Meet with key policymakers about issues involving youth work, and invite them to participate in community forums about youth.
- Provide a listing of colleges and universities that offer appropriate coursework for youth development careers for distribution at high school guidance offices.
- Develop a speaker's bureau of articulate youth development professionals.
- Establish a clearinghouse of data about youth worker salaries and benefits so youth organizations, funders and others can set higher wage standards.

Connect youth-serving agencies and facilitate collaboration.

- Set up community systems to pool professional resources for volunteer recruitment, training and assistance with strategic planning.
- Host monthly networking lunches, roundtable discussions or online workshops and chat rooms for youth workers.

A Strategy for Action

- Develop affinity group purchasing for health, dental and retirement benefits, technology (hardware and software), youth program materials and transportation.
- Recruit a pool of youth worker mentors who can assist, advise and encourage new youth workers; ask these mentors to facilitate seminars or support groups on positive youth development and best practices.
- Act as an intermediary to help youth-serving organizations and schools collaborate with each other, and share resources and expertise.
- Tap into colleges for talent and involve students and professors with youth work.

Provide training and technical assistance that meets the needs of youth workers.

- Provide low cost local training and other technical assistance that addresses youth worker needs identified in this study.
- Provide leadership training to empower youth workers.
- Establish a clearinghouse of information on youth service grants and other types of fund raising.
- Create a repository of resources and information related to effective youth service delivery, including program resource "kits" that can be borrowed for use with children.

Funders can:

Streamline paperwork in grant applications and reporting procedures to allow youth workers to spend more time with children.

- Simplify grant applications and avoid redundant or unessential questions.
- Collaborate with other funders on a universal youth service grant application and report form.
- Work with youth organizations to reach agreement on reasonable outcomes that can be measured easily.

Establish funding policies that recognize the realities of youth work.

- Fund wages, benefits, professional development, technology maintenance and other operational expenses as a necessary part of a program budget.
- Help fund youth worker salaries and benefits at levels that stabilize and professionalize the youth work field.
- Conduct site visits, shadow a youth worker or volunteer at a youth organization to learn firsthand about the challenges faced by staff every day.
- Contract with a professional facilitator who can create and support effective collaborations among neighborhood youth organizations to solve common problems.
- Recognize the real value of consistent, day-to-day youth development for children rather than solely funding new or highly visible programs.
- Consider multi-year grants to allow youth workers time to develop and refine a program without worrying about next year's funding or premature program cut-off.

Government and public policymakers can:

Recognize and promote the positive benefits of youth development.

- Use the "bully pulpit" of government to address youth issues and promote the benefits of community involvement with kids.
- Realize your potential to connect and influence different sectors of the community, such as schools, business, civic groups, funders and nonprofits.

Maintain flexibility in policies toward schools and youth-serving organizations.

- Realize that intervention techniques (e.g. juvenile arrests, incarceration) must be balanced with adequate support for prevention and positive youth development.

A Strategy for Action

- Develop regulations for youth organizations that are effective, but not stifling.
- Eliminate red tape and bureaucracy in zoning, public transportation and other issues affecting youth work.

Help develop funding resources for youth organizations.

- Think creatively while examining all federal, state and local funding streams that could be utilized for youth development programs (e.g. TANF and portions of federal block grants).
- Create a community enhancement fund or a youth-run granting system using resources generated through specific funding streams (e.g. block grants, tax abatement fees).
- Write tax policies that encourage charitable giving (e.g. allowing charitable gifts up until April 15th to be itemized on the previous year's tax return, allow non-itemizers to itemize charitable gifts, create charitable tax credits).

Involve government staff in community youth work.

- In staff job descriptions, include the expectation of a certain amount of service to nonprofit youth organizations (as board members, as volunteers, as advisors or as community facilitators).
- Encourage key policymakers to spend time with a youth worker to gain first-hand knowledge of the impact their upper level decisions have on daily operational realities.

K-12 educators can:

Recognize the value of positive youth development.

- Incorporate the principles of Search Institute's 40 Assets model into your school activities (see www.search-institute.org).
- Determine the developmental needs of your students by conducting Search Institute's attitudes and behavior survey in your school.
- Open a dialogue between administrators at schools and social service agencies to discuss positive alternatives to expulsion and preventative measures to benefit students.
- Create opportunities to bring caring adults from the community into regular contact with students (e.g. parent events, lunch buddy programs with community adults, tutoring sessions).

Facilitate collaboration between schools and after-school youth programs.

- Allow youth organizations to showcase their programs in schools and promote them to parents and students.
- Make school space available during non-school hours for community youth programs.
- Structure school bus routes to provide transportation for students to after-school programs.
- Work with community youth organizations to develop a child-focused continuum of learning experiences, and facilitate youth worker access to teachers.
- Collaborate with local youth agencies to establish a school-based family resource center, offering parenting classes, intervention and prevention tactics.
- Develop a pool of paid or volunteer staff members that can be tapped to run special after-school activities at local youth agencies.

Present youth work as a rewarding career choice for your students.

- Invite professional youth workers to address students at high school career days.
- Encourage students to become involved in community service projects with youth-serving organizations.

A Strategy for Action

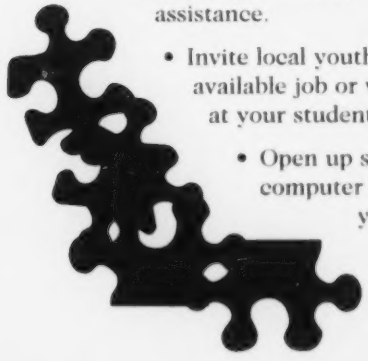
College and university educators can:

Provide educational opportunities that teach youth development skills necessary in youth work.

- Offer degrees or certificates in youth development and youth work.
- Provide courses that incorporate the principles of positive youth development (such as Search Institute's 40 Assets) and community cooperation.
- Require internships or practicums designed to give potential youth workers firsthand experience with children.
- Include instruction on administrative tasks often encountered by the frontline youth worker, such as program planning, budgeting, outcome evaluation and fund raising.
- Establish a Center for Excellence in Youth Work to study best practices and provide firsthand learning opportunities for students and community youth workers.

Work with youth-serving organizations on mutually beneficial projects.

- Encourage and support student projects that apply newly learned skills to real-life problems encountered by youth organizations.
- Suggest that student clubs, fraternities and sororities "adopt" local youth organizations and provide volunteers, publicity, fund raising and other assistance.
- Invite local youth organizations to post available job or volunteer opportunities at your student career center.
- Open up space in a college gym, computer lab or classroom for youth activities and have college students learn by planning and conducting the sessions.



- Offer regular workshops for youth-serving volunteers to learn how to work with children and connect families to the community resources they need.

Recruit qualified candidates into the youth work field.

- At college career guidance events, present youth work as a rewarding career opportunity.
- Promote two-year degree programs, certification courses or "second career" options in youth work.
- Create a directory or online listing of existing educational offerings that would lead to a career in youth work.

Businesses can:

Recognize that corporate philanthropy is of high importance to customers, employees and stockholders.

- Consider corporate funding of youth organizations as an investment in youth and the future of the community; stress the value of having out-of-state corporate headquarters support youth groups in your local area.
- Use a "venture philanthropy" approach to provide long-term, hands-on involvement in selected youth organizations, focusing on improved management capacity and quality staff development.
- Encourage employees to serve on youth organization boards, and create flex-time policies to allow them to volunteer with children regularly during key after-school hours.
- Sponsor an advertising campaign to recognize outstanding community youth workers; "brand" your company as a supporter of positive youth development.

Provide in-kind resources to youth organizations.

- "Adopt" a local youth organization and provide volunteers, management counseling, technology resources and training for staff.

A Strategy for Action

- Share available office space with youth organizations for after-school tutoring.
- Work with youth organizations to design a program that teaches young people about your business; bring them to your company site, and provide learning experiences and interaction with employees.
- Offer youth organizations an opportunity to benefit from your bulk purchasing of supplies, hardware and software.

Look for entrepreneurial projects that address youth organization needs.

- Develop a van pool to transport children from school to after-school activities.
- Create a temporary agency of qualified, screened youth workers who could fill in when youth organization staff members take a vacation or attend a workshop.
- Organize a freelance pool of grant proposal writers, special event coordinators, publicists, bookkeepers, etc. with expertise in youth organization realities.

Media can:

Think positively when it comes to children and youth.

- Inspire your community to view young people as assets rather than as problems.
- Be intentional about regularly covering positive stories about the good work being done by community youth, volunteers and youth-serving organizations.
- Balance negative stories about youth with possible solutions or preventative measures.
- Encourage media representatives to become involved with youth organizations as board members, community advisors or volunteers.
- Accept and run public service announcements that promote positive youth development.

Foster healthy community-wide discussions about youth issues.

- Use editorial pages/air time to reflect on the value society places on youth and youth work.
- Develop a Youth Topic of the Week and encourage responses from all sectors of the community.
- Establish a Youth Editorial Board to participate in editorial deliberations or write opinions on key youth topics.
- Solicit comments about youth issues from local government, business and civic leaders; ask for specifics on how they are helping to promote the healthy development of youth.

Arts and humanities groups can:

Extend educational outreach to include children served by youth organizations during non-school hours.

- Provide reduced fees, on-site educational programs, study guides, cafeteria privileges and other benefits to youth organizations as well as schools.
- Offer to send trained docents to youth agencies to present educational programs about your exhibits.
- Market exhibits to children and parents by informing local youth groups.

Be open to working with youth-serving organizations.

- Suggest collaborative projects.
- Consult with youth workers and children about future exhibits that would be of special interest.
- Make extra space available to youth organizations for regular activities.

A Strategy for Action

There are some things we all can do:

Foster community awareness of the value of positive youth development.

- Publicly recognize and reward exemplary youth service.
- Use speaking opportunities at civic, parent, school, religious and social group meetings to highlight successful youth programs.
- Help establish and support a Youth Advisory Council to guide community activities.
- Write op-ed's or letters to the editor about the good work local young people are doing for others.

Get involved in collaborations that support youth.

- Work with community leaders and local youth to assess the needs of young people and help provide community solutions.
- Seek ways to facilitate interagency cooperation among youth development agencies and other community services, including schools, hospitals, child welfare and juvenile justice.
- Involve libraries, senior citizens' groups, religious communities or social organizations in intergenerational youth programs.
- Help identify available space within a community for youth activities, and work with youth to refurbish it as a youth center.

Connect with a child.

- Demonstrate interest in, and respect for, children and youth in all ways, large and small: Smile, learn their names, listen to their jokes, ask their opinions, give them responsibilities, set boundaries, let them know you are there for them.
- Volunteer on a consistent basis at a local youth organization; learn about the children there and look forward to greeting them the following week.
- Encourage and empower youth to solve problems in the community and encourage them to take on tough challenges and responsibilities.

Conclusion

What all kids need most are positive relationships with caring adults who are passionately committed to their very existence. While these relationships exist ideally and primarily in families, caring youth workers at community-based organizations also play a strong role in making a positive impact on children.

As this report demonstrates, however, their work with youth is not child's play. It requires a selfless commitment to young people, regardless of many challenges. These challenges should be viewed as opportunities for all of us to take action.

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Serving those who work with youth

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